

PORTALS

Literary and Arts Magazine

Editors

Jada Ach
Blythe Bennett
Linda Eicken
Lynn Ezzell
Kerrie Holian
Kevin Knight
Anitra Louis
Jennifer McBride
Katherine P. McEwen
Mandy Murfee
Dylan Patterson

Layout/Design

Jada Ach
Blythe Bennett
Lynn Ezzell
Linda Eicken
Anitra Louis
Jennifer McBride
Dylan Patterson

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The Road to Treblinka

Bryan Moss

Slowly starving,
Chewing on only hope,
A Warsaw child, stripped of youth,
Lies, in a trampling crowd,
Fetal, beside her corpse,
Which yesterday shook
A beggar's tin,
But today
Did not
Begin.



Louise McColl Award



Timothy Jackson

The Legacy

Maria Squitieri



Fourteen hours, fourteen stinkin' hours on a Greyhound to see the son-of-a-bitch. What the hell was I thinkin'? Why does it matter now? How I let Billy talk me into goin', I'll never know. There's not a time I can remember when that man was nice. What the hell makes him so deservin' now? Mama deserved better, so did Katie, but they never got any better than dead.

The memories, they're like surreal nightmares. I remember my miserable existence as a kid growin' up in a war zone. I remember the three of us kids just tryin' to stay outta his way, and mama just tryin' to keep him at bay. Military plus whiskey makes for one mean old bastard. That August got outta hand though. He'd come roarin' up the drive and we could tell it was gonna be bad. Every night the screamin' and the hollerin' made us crazy. Katie would just sit there rockin' herself back and forth waitin' for silence. We all waited for the silence. Billy, well he was dad's favorite, and it bothered him but it always seemed not to. I'd just sit there poundin' my old baseball mitt with my fist. We'd hear the slaps he'd lay on Mama. One day, one day I just knew I'd get even with the son-of-a-bitch.

Now look at me, travelin' all this way to see the miserable bastard on his deathbed. Billy pleaded with me to come. "C'mon Brad, it's the last time you *have* to see him. The doctors say he's goin' fast," like that was some sort of incentive. I can still remember the last time I laid eyes on him, the day he dropped Billy and me off at Aunt Sarah's house, the day of Mama's funeral. We watched him pull out the drive and for the first time I could breathe. I knew he wasn't comin' back for us, and I was damn glad about it, too.

The last day in August '68, the last day of Katie's short life. He'd come home bitchin' about dinner to Mama. Billy and me, we were outside cleanin' out the shed. We heard them yellin'. They were always yellin'. It didn't dawn on us that Katie was right there in the middle of all of it. Then we heard Mama let out a scream, but not an ordinary scream like the ones she let out when he'd hit her. It was a blood-curdling scream, gut-wrenchin'. Billy and I bolted through the door only to find Mama in one corner of the kitchen and Katie laying lifeless on the floor in the other. Her skin was bluish-white, and thick red blood trickled from her small mouth. Mama was crunched in the corner and Billy ran to her. The son-of-a-bitch wouldn't let me near Katie. He wasn't cryin' or screamin' no more, he just stood there all proud over his kill; just like a wild animal. Billy and me stood in a cloud of dust as the ambulance took Katie away. Doctors ruled in an accident. They said Katie tripped and fell and hit her head. We knew differently. We knew he pushed her down, we knew.

Mama was never the same after that. She'd lie in a heap on the couch or lay up in bed. He didn't even argue with her that much afterwards. There was no fight left in her. Billy and I would hear him laughin' as he'd come outta the bedroom, "Thanks for nothin', you dead fish. Lazy bitch, good for nothin'." Mama lay around for three years in some sorta catatonia. Just moved about enough, I guess. Then she just died. She told us in a barely audible, recognizable voice that she loved us, and then she just died. After her funeral he drove us to Aunt Sarah's, and that was it.

Billy's here at the bus station just like he said he would be. How he turned out so adjusted, I don't know. Me, I got my demons. The whiskey claimed my family as well, not in the same way, though. My wife took herself and my baby girl Katie out of it. She just left. Times are different, women just leave nowadays.

I don't hold no grudges, she was right to leave. The hospital's ten minutes away, and Billy and I do the polite chit-chat thing. We didn't stay too close in the years that followed. We just kinda went our separate ways. He was a good kid, though. We never talked about Mama or Katie, and you could tell his uneasiness when he spoke to me. "Look, can you try to be nice, decent at least? He is dyin' you know." I looked at Billy and smirked in disbelief. Saint Anne's Hospital. 'Cause my father was such a religious man. Ha! I thought. We entered his hospital room, and I couldn't help notice how nice and white it was. Sterile, clean. Mama didn't get that, and Katie died on the kitchen floor. I could feel the anger wellin' up inside. Billy went over to him first. I read his chart. Liver damage, well ain't that irony for you. The drink got him after all. Billy talked to him for a while, almost like nothing had happened. The old man talked back. Who would have known he'd be able to have a decent conversation. I don't remember him ever just talkin'. Billy waved me over, "Hey dad, Brad's here," Billy told him like it was gonna mean somethin' to him. I walked over and just stared at him. I couldn't find the generosity that Billy had. It wasn't there, and I wasn't fakin' it. "How are you son?" he asked. Son? Son, he says! He never called me son. What the hell was I to him all those years when he didn't call me son? He could see my anger I suppose, cause then he came up with his words of wisdom. "Don't do it, Brad, don't let the anger get you. Don't let it do to you what it did to me." What the hell am I hearing? An admission? He had a fault? I just stared at him. I couldn't find words for him, not gentle ones at least. Tears welled up in his eyes. "I loved you kids, and I even loved your mama. What happened to Katie just about killed me. I had to be how I was, or at least that's what I thought. My daddy taught me to be tough, to be a man. I became him." My mind was swirlin' by this point. How dare you utter Katie or Mama to me! Then what? Your

daddy taught you this? I looked away at this point. Could he be right, and this is a legacy passed between generations? I looked back at him, this time a little differently. I felt sorry for the poor bastard, not like pathetic sorry but genuinely sorry. He had suffered at his father's hands what I had endured by his. He was tryin' to get it to stop. By tellin' me this, his own private secret, he was tryin' to stop it. He was openly cryin' now, and Billy looked on in amazement. Probably the first time Billy had an expression that I noticed. I looked down at him. He looked like he was searchin' for somethin', and then it dawned on me. He was. I put my hand on his shoulder and told him it was OK. It was as if at that second, the second I said that, we could both breathe.

Billy and I spent three hours with him that day. He passed away at eight in the evening that same night. He needed us there, and I'm glad we were. He was right, my old man, he was right when he said it had to stop. I had to stop. All those years of anger were destroying me. I called my ex the next day, explained what had happened and pretty much apologized for being a jerk and a drunk. She told me it was OK and put my little Katie on the phone with me. "Hey daddy!" and she was gigglin', I found myself smilin', and I told her that I loved her.

"I love you too, daddy."

Click, Click

Janiel Blackman



“Turn your 4-way flashers on and stick together,” says a man stepping out of the car in front. He is looking sharp in his black suit. As he gets into the driver’s side of the van, I wonder how many black suits he owns.

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click,” goes the flashers. Our black Suburban pulls in behind the limo that is following a black van being driven by the sharp dressed man in the black suit. I look in the side view mirror, and I see the line of cars with flashers running following us down the road.

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

In our car, no one is speaking. All we can hear is the sound of the flashers.

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

They seem to be getting louder and louder and louder. I almost want to scream for the clicking to stop. But no one in the car is saying anything. We are all looking straight ahead, deep in thought about where we are going and what is going to happen when we get there.

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

I look down at the mauve skirt I am wearing. I take my hand and smooth out the wrinkles across my lap. I think about how I purposely wore mauve today because I am trying to be strong. Ruth would have been strong, and she would not have shown any sign of mourning. You wouldn’t catch Ruth wearing any black today, so I wouldn’t dare wear black either. I gain a little strength thinking about her, and it causes me to sit a little

taller in my seat. But that strength is only temporary as I am bought back to reality by the sounds of the flashers.

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

One week ago, I was in my mom’s home fixing her breakfast the day after her surgery. Her arm had been bothering her for the last six months. My mom, Ruth, had a high tolerance for pain, and you never heard her complain about anything, but that arm, that arm gave her many painful days. I was so glad she would finally get relief. She woke up fine that morning and asked me to fix her bacon, eggs and grits. I constantly got on her about watching her cholesterol, but this morning I would fix her anything she asked for. I put the bacon in the frying pan and left it while I checked on my daughter. Both of my girls spent the night with me at my mom’s house. I was helping my daughter figure out something on the computer until the smell of burnt bacon reminded me of what I was supposed to be doing. The bacon was burning and quickly started smoking.

My mother started screaming, “What in the world are you doing in there? You are going to set off the smoke alarm, and I don’t want to hear all that noise this morning! Open the windows, turn the ceiling fan up higher, do something to get the smoke out!” Even though she was screaming, I didn’t mind. I was just glad she made it through the night okay and was feeling well enough to be able to scream. I quickly got moving to get the smoke out of the house. It didn’t take long with the windows open and the fan circulating air.

“Help me go to the bathroom,” my mom said. She had spent the night in the recliner because of a morphine pump on her shoulder. She didn’t think she would be able to lay down comfortably with the pump on, so the recliner did the trick. It had been some 24 hours since she had been on her feet, and she didn’t feel comfortable trying to stand up on her own. I reached under her arm to guide her to her feet; I can still feel how soft her arm was when I think back to that day. As she rose to her feet, she all of a sudden collapsed. I tried my best to not let her hit the floor,

but I was surprised at how heavy she was, and I was quickly losing my balance. I called for my brother to come help me. Even though it was clear that she passed out, my brother talked to her and joked with her trying to wake her up. He guided her to the couch where she collapsed in his arms. He kept shaking her and slapping her face trying to get her to come to, but she wouldn't wake up. I got on the phone, dialed 911 and told them what was going on.

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

That was last Saturday. This Saturday, I am in my mom's mauve suit and silver shoes trying to be strong. If my mom was here, she would say, “Honey chile, keep your head up. Don't let this get you down.”

I've seen Ruth be strong as she lost her mom, her husband and a son. I'm going to try hard to draw on that strength as we proceed down the road to memorialize her.

I can't help but think: “How am I going to make it without talking to her every day? How am I going to make it without her?”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

“Click, Click”

I look straight ahead and try not to think about the future. If I can get through today it will be a miracle.

As we arrive at our destination, I look at all the cars that are there. The parking lot is full, and there is a line of cars down the driveway and on the side of the road. I see familiar faces walking through the parking lot. We follow the limo as it circles the lot. I notice that the doors to the hall are opened, and people are standing there because there is no more room inside. The limo stops at the front door and we stop behind it.

The clicking has stopped.

God, I miss that clicking



Timothy Jackson

Consolations and Desolations I: A Short Parable

Marlowe Moore

The ox she pulls the plow
she bears the yoke
she puts the straight lines on this earth

Sharecropper says "look at all this work I
done"

but she don't have the voice to tell him
all you've done is walk behind.



Faculty Prize

Your Poem Is Not Better Than Mine Just Because It Is True

Eryn Roberts



My sister is currently having an affair with a cashier at Walgreen's.
This cashier, when I walked up to him, my arms filled with
condoms
and brown eggs, said I seemed like a very ironic person.

I have to wonder about that, and if he has ever felt similar.
He is wearing a necktie and this seems almost normal, but
we are in Walgreen's and he is a cashier, blue-collar, blue-eyes

near blue-wanna be someone else tie, something is wrong.
I go home and I decide to write a poem about this,
but when I hand it to my sister, she tells me it isn't true,

Any of it. She places her own poem in my lap, but my hands won't
open,
they are fists, the fists you see in sonogram pictures of babies,
black and white. The kind of fists doctors say is really just an
infant's

way of waving hello, but you can clearly see where the fingers
touch the palm, squeezing, and you know he is lying and
you know you are about to birth a very angry-red or terrible

person. My sister knows this about me, that I am slow to
change, so she reads her poem aloud. It is a love poem,
about the windows we would open at night as children and
she always thought of them as flesh, their hinges as bone.

I know she is somehow asking me for help, but I don't know
how to open my hands and I don't know how to read another
person's poem without thinking mine are better just because

everyone thinks all of my poems are untrue.



Uliana Goncharova

Journey to the Sun

Robert Howard Taylor



Despite my best laid plans, the day began the same as any other... boring. A pale, washed-out Moon poked weakly through the blinds as I dragged myself to my feet. Mother had already left for work; I imagine after months of delinquent deception, she wasn't quite in the mood for another explosive diatribe about the uselessness and futility of New Mexico schools. A bowl of crunchy cereal and a quick bit of power gaming was what I had in mind, but I expected Dad to pull into the driveway in the next hour or so to pick me up. With all this free time expulsion had given me, I guess he figured I could make time to meet some of his friends on the Rez.

Squeaking brakes and the quiet crunch of gravel under tires drew me from my reverie and announced my father's approach. My sister and I piled quickly into Dad's cramped car and struck out west leaving Los Lunas sneering its lunar light into the rearview mirror. Waxen tumbleweeds bounced haphazardly across the long, desolate highway. Miles and miles of broken earth and bitter trees and tangled shrubs crowded the road like blank-faced fighters shoving us against the asphalt ropes. Peering out the window was like spying on a cadaverous wasteland, bare-boned and rotting, shaded in pale Moon-light. A distant, burning orb struggled to breach the malaise that coated us in its filthy grasp.

After what felt like eons travelling along a lunar landscape, we pulled onto an undistinguished road tucked away off the main drag. The meandering trail guided us gently past a sign that quietly announced we were entering the Laguna Reservation: *Welcome!* Several brightly-colored signs decorated with smiley-faced Suns relaxed along the path explained the events of the day in a warm, inviting tone as we drew closer to the sounds of a large celebration.

A quick turn into a parking area, and we all bounded out into the crowd filling the village square. Stalls, groaning from the weight of various knickknacks and foodstuffs, hugged the merry masses close while small packs of strolling musicians inspired song and dance. My ears perked at the sound of the music as my

nose twitched in pleasure at the fragrance of buttery corn, and my mouth salivated over roasting birds. The Sun had burned away the Moon, blanketing the small pueblo town in its warm, shining rays. My sister, her face exuberant, scampered among the turquoise dealers, gleefully haggling for bright, silvery bits and bobs. My father solemnly shook hands with his friend Kevin, the chief's son.

"We're going to head over to get some grub," my Father said. "Why don't you tag along? You can meet Kevin's father." I nodded in acceptance, and we strode away from the party like three musketeers on a mission to fill our bellies. Tucked gently among the other houses was the humble home of Kevin's father, the tribe's chief and shaman. Images of the Sun, its wavy rays flowing like fire, adorned several of the windows and doors of the villa. Kevin's father greeted us at the portal inside, his knowing eyes and kind smile instantly soothing the agitation I didn't realize I had felt. "Our family is your family, and our table is yours. Eat lots," he said, and we dived in with gusto. "Eat lots."

One fulfilling meal and lots of friendly talk later, my father drew me aside and suggested we take a walk and discuss my future plans. Once outside, I saw a hilltop with what appeared to be a spectacular view, so we oriented that way and pushed forward into the valley below. The bright Sun burned overhead, illuminating my distant goal, its pinnacle a craggy pillar pointed into the heavens. "Some of these hills are considered sacred, son, but I'll help you to the top as best I can," Dad said.

As soon as we hit the bottom of the valley, I noticed the dense brush was hiding a swampy draw. "I suppose this'll be good practice for the 82nd Airborne," I weakly joked. "It does certainly look like the only path from this end," he replied. As I pushed through the brush, barbed limbs and scraggly vines tugged and dragged me back, turning every step into a battle for another foot of soggy, smelly ground. The warm, Sun-lit world vanished when I stepped inside the dank undergrowth, and I shivered from the chill of its depths. "You'll have to get your GED first, which will be a couple of months," my father called out from somewhere in the dense thicket (immediately followed by swearing as a particularly vindictive root wrestled him to the watery earth).

A sudden break, a burst of warm Sun, and I was free from the dense bushes and at the base of the long, rocky climb to the top of my mountain. Catching my breath, I pondered what he said. Months? Really?! A snapping branch crackled free as Dad pulled himself out of the mucky swamp, and a large hand came to rest on my shoulder. “But I want school finished now,” I sighed. “I’m so tired of doing work that is so easy I can sleep through a class and get a passing grade. It’s so wasteful, spending all that time on nothing of value.”

A knowing grin spread on Dad’s face. “Sometimes life just takes patience, like that darned swamp. It might not seem valuable now, but you’ll never know if you don’t try,” he said. He glanced up the unwavering hill, bathed in blazing heat. “You sure you want to take this path? Sometimes things seem better than they really are when you’re looking up at them rather than looking back.”

I laughed. “Did you have a better idea in mind?” I said. “As a matter of fact, I do,” he chuckled back, pointing at an almost invisible path that circumvented the vegetative debacle we had just navigated. “I’ve got a school you might be interested in... might actually challenge ya, too. Think you can handle a school filled with smart kids?” he asked. “Worst case, you can always still sign up for the Army. I’m sure they will take you in a heartbeat.”

I paused a moment, absorbing his words like a leaf soaking up the bright Sun-light. “Your life is your choice, my boy, but sometimes patience helps you spot the better path, and that’s all I’ll say,” he said. With that statement lingering in the warm, afternoon ether, he took to the path to the right of the swamp, a gentle, rolling gait keeping time with the pulse of the burning orb hovering above.

I took a long look at the high hill in front of me, and the sweaty swamp behind, and leaped to catch him as he ambled out of sight. “So tell me about this school--”

...the Sun blazed merrily, celebrating freely with the people below...

Dawn's Early Light

Maria Squitieri

Far off lands, distant places
Leave you far from loved ones
A “job to be done” is what they tell you
But *they* are safe at home.
Mortar shells fly and grown men cry
Hiding low in trenches
Just trying to stay alive
Until, they too, are safe at home
The stench of death
Surrounds you now
And the wailing of dying soldiers
Can be heard
Cries for mothers
Who have long since departed,
Like dawn's early light
To guide them
Til, they too, are safe at home.



Jason Ward

Riverfront
Hillora Lang

My bones feel the challenge of
existence this riverside
day, August in Wilmington.
Turgid heat performs acts of
vampirism, sucking away
the life from our souls. Sun high,
sky drawn, colorless, dusty
trees on the far bank long for
cleansing. Will forgiveness fall?

Who in their right mind would sit
outside willingly, endure
willfully depredations of
southern summer? Right or no,
one toughened soul, older man,
black skin grayed from time living
has established his place.
Sanctuary on a bench,
'neath blue and white umbrella.

Greying beard trimmed, neatly pressed
slacks, shirt buttoned to the top,
he gazes across water
barely rippling with currents.
The old book, hardcover green,
well-read pages splayed with use
his favorite passages
marked by coordinated
colored tabs, heat-drenched words clasped.

Could he philosophize about
the nature of the world, of
mankind, read Aristotle,
Plato, Confucius, seek truth
and understanding in the

words of the ancients? Or find
balm for his heart in reading
poetry, Wordsworth, Frost, Berry,
escape heat in northern hills?

I, yet shy, having seen him
there, would retrace my steps but
cannot, bound by old constraints.
Walk by, walk away, missing
my chance to learn what he knows.
Maybe he lives by the rule,
“Thou shalt not bore God,” and so
waits on his bench for the chance,
once again, to be amazing.



Nathaniel Houseman

Finding Zawadi

Kelsey Woods



She watched her daughter, hand in hand with her new husband, emerge from the doorway of the church. White confetti and bubbles filled the air as the couple made their way to the car engulfed in white window paint, streamers, and empty cans. She stared, smiling at the beautiful woman her daughter had grown up to be. The new bride turned around one last time and blew a kiss to her mother. As she watched her daughter slide into the passenger seat and sweep the train of her wedding gown into the car, she couldn't help but to remember the miraculous day when she first saw that starved little child.

Her assignment was to travel to Nigeria and document the life and hardships of the native people. As a travelling journalist, she rarely found herself sleeping in the same place for more than two or three weeks. She arrived on a small plane at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja, the new capital city. Looking out of the window from the back seat of the taxi, she kept thinking that it was just like any other city with the same tall buildings and busy streets. However, Abuja was far from anything she had seen before. She never went into an assignment blind, so she knew from her research that the massive green dome she saw in the distance was the top of the National Assembly Complex. She was the most pleased, however, when the taxi drove past the famous Ship House in Abuja, a magnificent structure that made the woman think of a ship turned inside-out, only exposing the white skeleton. Unfortunately, the tremendous architecture and green parks were no warning for the horrors she would later encounter.

For the remainder of the taxi ride, her mind was preoccupied with thoughts of what she might see outside the city. She knew also from her research that the majority of the population living in Nigeria was poverty-stricken. She also knew that this towering city was probably the only wealthy region of the country, and as soon as she ventured away into the rainforest or onto the coastal plains, she would see what she really came here to

write about.

The taxi stopped just inside the edge of the city, and she transferred herself and her bags into yet another taxi. However, this wasn't like any taxi she had ever been in. It was a large military vehicle with camouflaged paint and tires that towered over her. Two large, sculpted men with rifles and harsh faces stepped out of the vehicle. One grabbed her bags and tossed them into the back while the other opened the rear door and motioned for her to climb in. She hesitated at first, reluctant to go anywhere with these cold soldiers; however, she remembered that this was the safest way to travel to the village of Umuluwe.

The ride to the village was bumpy and uneventful. The terrain was vast and mostly flat, serving nothing for the eye to feast on. The men sitting in front remained completely silent, refusing to answer her questions about the wildlife she spotted along the way. After a while, she began to worry if her stomach could handle much more of the bumps and ruts in the dirt road. She stared out the window, concentrating hard on the scenery when a small village emerged from over a hill. She stared, fascinated with the view, all the while thinking that it was just something else they would pass by. But the vehicle never turned, and the village continued to get closer.

The Humvee pulled into the village and stopped beside a mud-hut set apart from the rest. The driver got out and disappeared into the hut, leaving the other two to sit again in silence. After some time, the driver emerged from the hut with another man trailing behind him. His traditional Agbada outfit brushed the dusty ground and seemed to float around his feet as he walked toward the waiting woman. The back door was opened once more by the driver, and the woman cautiously stepped down to meet the man before her. He immediately spread his lips into a wide grin and stretched his hand out to shake hers. He introduced himself as Jenebi and spoke with a heavy accent in perfect English. He informed her that American mercenaries had previously visited and taught some of the people their language and culture, including the handshake.

As the other men stashed her belongings in the hut, the

woman walked beside Jenebi, asking him questions about the people and life in the village. She recorded their conversation so she could refer to it later, but after a time she didn't think such documentation would even be necessary. Everything she heard and saw brought tears to her eyes: children dressed in rags drinking rank, muddy water; a family of ten living in a single-room hut. She couldn't even imagine having to drink that water for the duration of her stay, let alone all her life.

For two days she walked around the village taking notes and getting as much information as she could out of Jenebi. For two nights she cried herself to sleep on her bed palate. Her thoughts strayed to her childhood and how she thought her family was poor. Her mother never bought brand-name food from the grocery store unless she had a coupon for it, and the only clothes she wore were hand-me-downs from her mother's childhood. She kept thinking how naïve she had been for ever complaining. However, nothing that she saw in those first two days compared to how she felt the first time she saw the dying little girl.

On the third day of her stay in the village, she continued to wander around and take photographs for the article she was writing. She was looking through the viewfinder of her camera and scanning the area for a good shot when she locked eyes with a tiny child. Dark chocolate eyes and a body of skin and bones, the little girl was too weak to move from the platform she had been laid upon. As she stared into those eyes, the woman felt the threads of her heart pull tight. Since Jenebi had been so nice and helpful before, she sought him out for an explanation of the tragic picture she had seen. When she towed him back to the tiny girl, Jenebi explained that when a family is too poor, the weakest child must be sacrificed in order to feed those who are able to work. He spoke of the situation as if it were a common occurrence to see a naked child laid out in the baking sun to die.

Still, as she looked into those glassy eyes, her tear ducts betraying her, the woman knew she had been led to this devastating place for a reason. The child's family was not able to take care of her, so they were giving her back to Mother Earth in exchange for a small serving of food. She stood staring at the

dying child for a long time. Even now that she knew occurrences like this happened frequently, that one last tug of the strings in her heart made her realize that she knew what she had to do. She stashed the camera in her backpack and bent down to touch the back of her hand to the child's face. She knew the girl didn't have much time left, so she told Jenebi that she needed a vehicle immediately to take them back to the city. After retrieving a blanket from her hut, she wrapped it around the child's naked body and lifted her as gently as possible. Walking away cradling the precious bundle in her arms, she vowed to do whatever it took to save the life of the little girl.

The drive back to the capital city seemed even longer than it had the first time. When Abuja neared, the woman expected to once again switch transportation, but the same two silent soldiers drove all the way to the hospital instead. When she entered with the bundle in her arms, the woman was immediately bombarded with questions about money and hospital bills. However, after explaining to the nurses and staff that she would pay completely for the girl's care (and proving it with a copy of her bank statement), the child was taken back into the emergency room.

As soon as the girl was safe in the hands of the hospital staff, the woman went in search of a telephone. She had a mental list of the people she needed to speak with: the airport (to cancel her flight home), her parents, her boss, and finally, her landlord. After all, she had to explain that a new resident would be living with her in the one-room loft apartment she rarely occupied. She had always been married to her work, never having any time to spend the money it earned her. The only thing she did spend it on was the few bills she had (along with souvenirs she bought for presents on holidays or birthdays), so most of it accumulated in her bank account. She silently thanked herself for being so frugal over the years.

Throughout the weeks of tedious waiting at the hospital, stacks of adoption papers and health care forms were filled out and mailed away. While the girl slept, the woman would think endlessly about the new life she was going to have. She would have to find a job that was more settled, find a new place to live,

and most importantly, learn how to teach an African child the English language. The more she thought about the changes, the more she welcomed them, even needed them. Her life full of travel and adventure might have been exciting, but she was lonely and had a strong urge to settle down. She was excited about becoming a mother, even if the circumstances were bizarre.

When the girl started to show improvement, she was moved to a different area of the hospital to complete her recovery. The woman spent most of her time beside the girl's bed and would hold her hand and sing softly to comfort her. In only three weeks, the child began to return the squeeze of the woman's hand. Days later, while the woman was singing to the sleeping girl, she opened her eyes, and a gap-toothed grin spread widely across her face. The woman realized that this was the first time she had ever seen the girl smile, and she knew that the pulling in her heart had been right all along.

It was one month, three weeks, and four days that the woman sat by the girl's bedside. The two had grown inseparable while the woman watched the girl's body fill in and gain strength. Even though the girl was just starting to understand the simplest of English phrases, they had been practicing for over a week, and the girl was a sponge when it came to learning. The only thing the woman could never figure out about her new daughter was her name. She tried every way she could think of to ask the girl; she even got the nurse to ask her in her native language, but the girl would never say. After debating for a few days, the woman finally decided that she would have to give the girl a name herself. She thought it was only fitting that the girl be given an African name; however, she didn't know any. At a loss, she asked the girl's nurse if she knew of a good name for her new daughter. In reply, the nurse suggested in a heavy African accent, "Call de chil' Zawadi. It will remind her every day dat she was a gift to you."



Amanda Rivera

Tuesday Morning Coming Down

Erich Hofmann



Dead seagull lies still.
The old woman whistles,
drowning the sound of
horns
and tailpipes.
She ambles slowly across roads
uncaring.
An elegy she whistles
for this gull,
who cawed his way
across the face of disaster
to claim the pavement
as his.
Perhaps, if he had been taller,
someone would have swerved.
The old woman whistles,
drowning the sound of
horns
and tailpipes-
a wooden cane supports
an aged wing.

We Are Worlds Apart

Nathaniel Houseman



Gravity takes over as a single drop of sweat collects and glides down my forehead bypassing my nose resting on my lips; I taste the salt. Really, I taste the heat of the Caribbean, even under the shade of the tall colorful architecture towering over both sides of the street. It takes just the right combination of concentration and coordination to walk these cobblestone streets but especially during the occasional glance up at dogs barking from the rooftops. Strange...how do they get up there? Classic cars from the 50s fill the streets. The sound of crisp brass and pounding drums echoes from local bands playing in the cafés. Suddenly, I catch the sweet aroma of strong coffee and smooth cigars filling the air. Bienvenidos a Cuba...Welcome to Cuba!

Through a series of events, I'd been invited to visit the island with a Cuban American minister who'd left Cuba many years ago. We obtained religious visas, which is one of the few exceptions to the U.S. Embargo that allowed us to travel into the country legally. This was more than just an exciting trip; it was a tremendous learning experience. Like a glass of cold water in the face, I was about to be woken up to see my own spoiled Americanized self. I was diving into another world that would make me question my own. This island of about 11 million people lies just south of the Florida Keys, and yet we are worlds apart.

I never dreamed an entire nation of people would present me with one of the greatest life lessons I've ever received. For years I'd taken for granted the many "*things*" enjoyed by most Americans. I never really considered what it would be like to live in such a restrictive environment. Sears, Starbucks, and Sam's Club--each are household names for many Americans and all accessible with a debit card and a quick whip of the wrist. Comfort foods, credit cards, and capitalism: ain't life grand? The many freedoms and privileges that surrounded me my entire life were suddenly magnified as I considered the everyday limitations of this place. My exposure to this land of opposites forced a

realization upon me: I had taken so much for granted. I actually felt guilty for having so much and cherishing it so little. We all take things for granted; it's just hard to realize it until something/someone puts it in our face.

Within the first 24 hours on the island, the lifestyle and culture I witnessed began to work me over. How could I ever be ungrateful again? I was suddenly thrust into another realm of humanity where many things I'd experienced in everyday life were considered luxuries in this isolated place. Cuba is more than a tropical island in the Caribbean Ocean; it is an island set apart within the vast sea of mankind.

Sincere and genuine, these people are survivalists of a special breed raised and trained to love their country and never question it--at least not publicly. From their youth the government centered school system grows then blooms with new Cuban minds. Time and patience slowly cultivates the garden of Communism where fresh young vines are guided up the trellis to live and breathe and speak all things Cuban. The seeds of indoctrination will always bear fruit if they're planted in the fertile soil of children's impressionable minds.

I knew I was in a special and eccentric place before our plane landed. As the shabby charter plane rumbled over the 90 miles separating Miami and Havana, we finally pass over the first palm trees down below. All the other passengers began to clap and whistle in celebration. To avoid the awkwardness and keep myself unnoticed I clapped as well. "Maybe they will think I'm Cuban." The majority of passengers were Cuban exiles who left for political and economic reasons. They were visiting family members who couldn't leave Cuba if they wanted to. Then, it dawned on me; perhaps theirs was a far more awkward situation than mine. At times, I can be so trivial, so inward focused...if I could just realize what others are going through.

Exiting the plane we entered a dimly lit hallway which led into a larger room more like a warehouse than an airport terminal. The little bit of Spanish I knew had vanished in a cloud of nervous excitement. I felt like a fish caught in the current just going with the flow, not really knowing where to move next or where I'd end

up. Maybe if I don't make eye contact then the airport employees and customs agents won't talk to me. I felt like that foreign immigrant as he navigates his way through the United States trying to blend in for whatever its worth.

Finally, we get out into the open air of Cuba. Maybe I could breathe again. Leaving the airport parking lot there stands a large and blatant billboard declaring the resistance of the U.S. The message is clear; there is no tolerance for American policies in this place. Here in a nation whose president is a self proclaimed Marxist Socialist there is no tolerance for democratic ideals, freedom of speech, or the many other liberties associated with the western powers. From street corners to open highways in Cuba there are no fancy business slogans or advertisements of new products. The only billboards are government propaganda in dramatic nationalist fashion.

The infrastructure is dilapidated: roads, power lines, buildings, and bridges all look like they've been neglected for decades. Our driver took us on a whirlwind drive bobbing in and out of other cars, trucks, scooters, and the people who must have no Spanish equivalent for the word *jaywalking*. So charged by the excitement, I didn't think much about the thick diesel fumes bellowing out of most vehicles. There are no emissions laws in Cuba. By the end of the trip, I would literally be experiencing fatigue and a sore chest because of the harshness of inhaling this wonderful fragrance. Perhaps that is why many Cubans love their cigars. It would have to be a relief to breath in sweet tobacco smoke compared with this poison.

It didn't take long to find our *casa de alquilar* (rental house). Rather than lay up in the lap of luxury at a resort hotel next to the beach, we stayed in one of the inner barrios side by side with regular Cuban people. I enjoyed the idea of "living like a Cuban" for a while, and I got it too. Just taking a shower here was a task. Like an overcrowded garage, there were all sorts of wires hanging from the wall in our bathroom. Something like a light switch was haphazardly fashioned near the showerhead. For fear of flipping the switch so close to all that water, I didn't figure out until my third shower it was actually the hot water switch. I

prayed every time before I got into that shower. God knows I didn't want to die of electrocution some 900 miles from home, especially wet and naked in a tiny damp bathroom.

Our first sunrise in Havana broke to the sounds of a rooster cackling away right in the middle of the city. A street vender was shouting every minute or so while he swept through the neighborhoods selling papayas and mangos. Who needs an alarm clock in this place! My mind swirled about trying to arrange all the sights and sounds. For a short time I lived, ate, and conversed with Cubans of all sorts. I took in their culture, their coffee, and even their unique desert specialty of coconut and cheese. These were real, genuine people with their own distinct style of living. Americans are wound up so tight speeding through life to get to the next job, the next class, or the next entertainment fix. I struggled to follow their heated discussions as they spoke much too fast for me to understand; yet, I wondered at the dramatic shifts as they would suddenly return to a relaxed, almost rhythmic pace. There was no worry of being late—no worries about a schedule, a deadline, and never a feeling of being rushed. I liked this.

We were privileged to meet many different Cuban families. I can never forget one in particular living on the outskirts of Havana. They pastored a small church in their community which met under a makeshift shelter made of sheet metal and other available materials. For pews they had round cuttings from trees sanded down to make seats. A pigpen only about thirty feet away stole attention as large hogs and a few piglets rummage around snorting and grunting. The floor of that church was Cuba herself—packed dirt just like the Pastor had in his own house. They kept it well though, even sweeping the dirt floor to maintain its appearance. There's something incredibly humbling about people taking pride in their dirt floor.

This Pastor and his family showed us overwhelming hospitality. The wife hurried about to offer everyone a small Cuban café (just a small shot of espresso). It came served up in a tiny paper cup that a nurse might use to serve a patient their pills. The man greets everyone one at a time careful to make each one feel important. I needed to see this; these people who had so little

yet gave away so much. It's not so much the extreme poverty and base living that surprised me in Cuba, but rather the extreme generosity of the people in spite of it. They don't take anything for granted, unlike many in western society. If these people could be so genuine, so honest, and so sincere while having so little; how much more ought we to be who have so much? Gracias Cuba por abrir mis ojos.



Jason Ward

My husband wakes before me

Jennifer Ward



as faithfully as the red roster crows. Before thick cuts of hickory flavored bacon sizzle against the cast iron skillets or chubby links of sausage roll over, my husband is in the garden of greens and yellows. He tends to tiny dollar bills that have just began to sprout. I peek between the slits of wooden blinds, now painted an eggshell white. They said pastels would cheer me and brighten my otherwise dismal day. Steam makes its long awaited escape from the silver kettle on the back right burner. It screams its face off and drags me kicking and crying from my morning memories, the ones I glued in the navy-blue leather-bound scrapbook I made two weeks and three days after I laid my husband to rest beneath the trees we planted as young lovers.

as faithfully as his stepladder holds his solid frame and his steel toed boots. I wake to the hammer joining nails in a joyful union, just below my windowsill. Floral perfume push past the glass panes and occupy my minds stage with yellow cake and cream cheese icing smashed against layers of ivory foundation, coral tinted blush, and my mother's favorite tube of princess pink lipstick. I seize the lonesome pillow just below the vacancy sign that flashes above where my husband once lay partially on but most off his side of our bed. He promised sweet peas would bloom below our window in a box made of pine, painted my favorite shade of yellow that coordinates with our bumblebee welcome mat. I roll onto my dimpled side, being careful not to throw out my hip once more, pull back my cotton window treatment, and stare blankly at the empty window box filled with winter's white glory, absent are my sweet peas.

as faithfully as the pistons pumped in the 1952 cherry red Chevy truck. I rock in my oak framed glider with my needle diving into the dark blue cotton blend of my husband's jacket he wore on Sunday's over his stretched suspenders and pleated slacks. I often

hoped he would leave it on a pew and Sally Edwards, who I believe still harbored a sweethearts crush on my beloved, would snatch it up and take it home to her mini shrine and hungry cats. I darn the hole that grew in length, but not in width, as he attempted to hide the blunder from my blemish spotting peepers. I found the secret imperfection after a sudden urge to breathe him in. From his closet, that remained untouched by the invaders who suggested I give his things to charity, I unzipped the plastic that hugged his jacket and pressed my nose against its treads. I breathe him in until I am light on my feet and hover a half inch above the brown shag carpet.

as faithfully as the yipping mutt yaps at the paperboy, the milkman, and my favorite, Sally Edwards. I mend the jacket and smile at my work, holding it close, breathing it in. I hear an engine turning over outside my red brick fortress. There is only one vehicle that could make the windows rattle and it's been still for twenty years, rusting under layers of swamps jasmine, behind the old building claimed by time. I hurry to my front porch, scuffing along in my therapeutic shoes and pink terry cloth robe. The engine revs louder sending vibrations through the oak flooring and beneath my rubber soles. I pass the mirror in the foyer, glancing quickly at my graying strands, but double take at the woman staring back at me. I recognize her from my youth with her round face and ivory skin. Her hair is tied with a baby blue ribbon and her dress resembles the one I wore the night I met my husband. I round the corner and there he is standing by the cherry red Chevy truck with the yipping mutt peeking from the driver's side window. With my black Mary Jane strapped to my heels, I move towards my beloved, jump into the passenger's set and we drive along the golden streets to the Farms' Market just left of heaven's gate.

There are 20,000 Bodies in the Iraq Morgue

Karen Sboto

I think of my son,
How would I find him amongst the 20,000?

His feet are unremarkable,
His tall muscled body unmarked, by scars or tattoos.
His hair a common brown.
His face in death would be bloated and unrecognizable.
Without expression he will no longer look like me.

Finally, I hit on his crooked pinky.

It is the only visible genetic trait from his father.

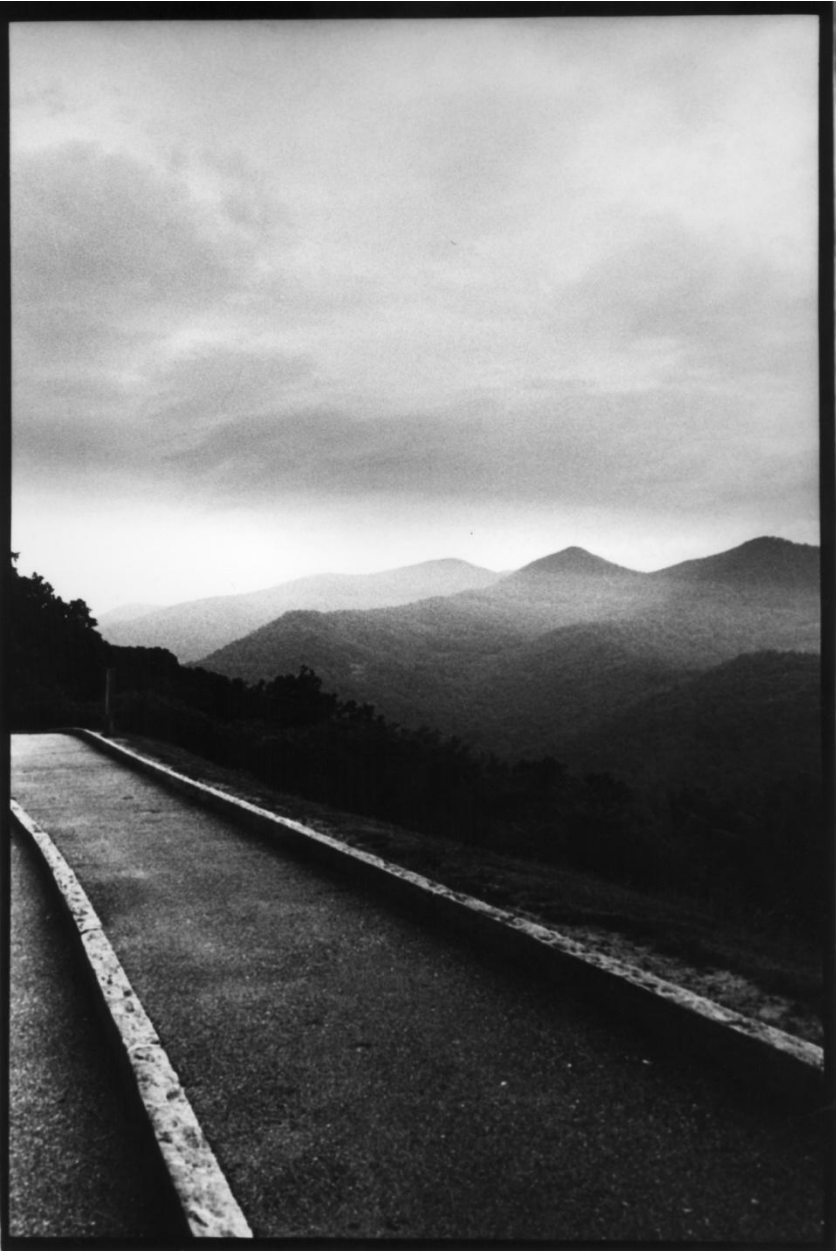
I envision the task of looking at 40,000 hands,
In search of that one crooked pinky.

In death it would still point into his ring finger.
Unmistakable to me:

A mother sifting through 20,000 tragedies.

Like Fire
(an abecedarian poem)
Christopher M. Costa

At first there is a spark which
Begins a burning passion that
Cannot be contained. Your
Days sing with laughter, and the
Evenings are lusty eternities.
From first view you know she is
Going to be the one for you.
Happiness overwhelms your heart, and
Immediately you feel the longing
Just to hold her in your arms and feel her tender
Kiss. Suddenly you realize that years have
Lapsed and you are deep in love.
Maybe you get married, but
Nothing ever lasts. One night you find its
Over and you're once again alone. Most
People just aren't made to live such
Quiet, happy lives. In truth, the
Rush is what we really live for, that
Spark that starts the flame.
Time itself will put out fires
Unless you find more fuel. She left you for
Variety, to believe that she's alive. So don't
Wait and wish her back, we all grow bored in
Xanadu. Its up to
You to live your life and find some kind of
Zeal before your days are over and there's nothing left to feel.



Meghan Kavanagh

Just Livin'
Sandra Workman



“Granny, you are Mommy’s mommy, right? Where’s your mommy, Granny? Does she live here with you like my mommy lives with me? There’s a lot of people that live here, is she one of them? Or is she in Heaven like Grandpop? ” Questions flowed out of the little girl like a flooding stream as fast as she could speak. Erma guessed that six-year-olds had a lot of thoughts they needed to get out, or they might just explode from all the not knowing. Once a month little Abby came by the home to visit for the afternoon. Her mother, Erma’s only daughter, would leave her there while she went shopping and got her hair done. It was always so good to see the little one, but she was too energetic for Erma’s old brain. At her age, she was tired and could barely keep up with her granddaughter. She figured she’d finally tell the girl about her childhood and maybe that’d keep her quiet for a spell.

“Sit down here, child. No, Abby, sit down on your bottom. You know what I’m talkin’ ‘bout. Sit. Goodness, girl. You are a handful. Sit down here with me and I’ll tell ya ‘bout my Momma. But, you gotta be good and quiet now, ya hear? If’n ya start getting all jumpy, I’m gonna stop tellin’ ya ‘bout her. And then we’ll go down to the dinin’ room and play cards with Thelma and Gladys. You don’t wanna do that now, do ya? I didn’t think so. Okay, well what’ya wanna know? Everything? Well, I’m guessing I should start from the start.” Erma sat back in the recliner and got ready for the story of her life, hoping the girl could sit still long enough for her to tell it. This might be the last chance Erma had to tell her before she joined John up in Heaven. Her time could only be so much longer here on Earth; she might as well let Abby know about her roots.

“See, I was a young’un, too. A long time ago, it was. But I was six years old once. I lived with my Momma. I didn’t have no Daddy. He died when I was a little baby. Momma said he was as

handsome as any actor. And she said he was smart as Einstein. I saw pictures of him, but I don't remember him none. So it was just me and Momma long as I can remember. I went to the little school down the road a piece. I lived in a little old town, 'bout an hour away from here. Not like you, with your fancy new school and big ol' buses that drop ya off at the front door. Sit still. It'll get better; I promise. Where was I? I was goin' to school. Well, I liked that old school. All a my friends; they was there. We played kickball and marbles all the time. You ain't never played with marbles? Child, what has your mother done to you? Well, don't you worry. I'll tell your Momma to get ya some and ya can play with 'em all day long." Erma shifted in her seat, knowing she had so much to tell the little one. Some of it, her daughter didn't even know. Maybe it was time to tell the whole story, not just the good parts. If Abby wanted to know so much, Erma would tell her what she wanted to hear about.

"I remember one day, I went home from school and Momma was out in the yard dancin'. No, she was dancin' by herself. Not a lick of music a playin' anywhere. She was just dancing. I asked her how she could dance if there weren't no music. She said she always heard music, even if there weren't no radio. Now, I thought that musta been pretty nice, not to have to turn the box on and off whenever ya wanted to dance. Momma just said she kept hearin' the same song over and over and sometimes it made her wanna dance. So there she was out in the yard, dancin' by herself over near the garden. I thought she looked like a princess at a ball that day. She was so pretty with the sunlight in her hair and the wind blowing her dress all 'round. I had never seen Momma look so happy. "At that moment, Erma quietly smiled at the thought of her beautiful mother in the garden. She looked over at Abby, who was finally still and listening closely. Time to move on.

"It wasn't too long before Momma was always dancin'. If'n she remembered to go to the grocery, she'd dance in the aisles. When she washed the clothes, she danced. One day she got up and threw the radio box out in the garbage can. She said we didn't need it no more. I

guess she forgot I couldn't hear the music without it, so there it went. Yes, Abby, she just threw it away. But she didn't stop dancin'. She said she always heard the song her and Daddy danced to before he went to Heaven. I'm a guessin' that was her favorite, 'cause she spent a long time with it in her head. Momma got so that we'd get up in the afternoon, instead of the mornin' like we used to. She said we needed to spend the evenings havin' fun and bein' alive. Now, girlie, I was a little girl 'bout your age, and I thought that was a mighty fine idea. We'd play cards and dance until almost daylight. Sometimes we'd lay out in the yard and count the stars and dream of where we were gonna go to someday. We'd eat sometimes, but most of time we just laughed and played with each other. Momma had become my bestest friend and we forgot about all the boring stuff that you're supposed to do. Heck, Momma told me that I didn't hafta go to school no more 'cause she was teachin' me her own self. I didn't see no problem, 'cause Momma was a whole lot nicer than mean old Mrs. Fickley. "A nurse walked in the room and handed Erma her medications and then quietly left. It must be close to noon. They always came by at this time. Lunch would be soon. Abby was spread out on the bed on her stomach with her face on her hands, ready for more.

"I didn't have no brothers or sisters. Just like you. Momma never went out with no other men. I asked her 'bout it a long time ago. She said she had already met the best man there ever was, and that she didn't need no other man. So I wasn't ever gonna have no brothers or sisters, and that I needed to take care of her when she was too old to do it herself. Now, I really didn't think Momma was ever gonna get old. Momma was so much fun, she was like having a sister. She stopped being like a momma and just did things that she wanted to do. If'n she wanted to go to the park, we'd walk down to the park. If'n she wanted to paint a picture, she'd paint a picture. She spent an awful lotta time in her room writin' things. She never told what she was a writin' about, but she had books and books full of writin'. I guess she had an awful lot to say to somebody."

“Now, Momma was a beautiful woman. She had the prettiest eyes I ever did see. And her hair was so soft and curly. I guess I got Daddy’s hair and eyes ‘cause I ain’t never been that pretty. Thank you, Abby, I think you are pretty, too. But Momma was beautiful. I always thought she was like a butterfly. So pretty to look at, but was always floatin’ around and kind of hard to catch. I don’t really remember Momma sleepin’ too much. She said she had too many things to do to waste time sleepin’. Most of the time she did let me sleep though. After we played all night long, I’d get tired and lay down on the couch or in Momma’s room. Every time I woke up she’d be right there watching me. Sometimes she’d look like she had been cryin’, and other times she looked like she couldn’t wait for me to get up so we could play some more. “Erma let out a soft sigh. It was such a long time ago, and there were so many memories. Maybe she should not have started this. It was too late now; she had to finish what she started.

“Well, one day me and Momma decided to go down to the river and go swimmin’. It was in March, I remember that. It was right before my birthday. I thought the water was kinda cold, but Momma said we’d warm up after we were in for a little while. So there we were, just swimmin’ and laughin’ together. That’s when Momma noticed a bridge overhead. She thought we should go up there and look down from over’n it. I hadn’t ever been on no bridge before, but Momma said it would be fun to be really high up and to see the world from up there. So, Momma took my hand, and we walked up the path to get up to that bridge. It seemed like we walked a hundred miles to get there, but we did it. And, Girlie, it was the most wonderful view. You could see for miles and miles. We just sat there lookin’ out at the world and bein’ quiet so we could hear the wind. Momma said that was what it felt like to be free. I never really thought we weren’t free already. We did whatever we wanted to do. Momma didn’t even care that the light man came by and turned off the electricity. She said we could use candles and pretend like we were havin’ a party. Momma

never got mad or yelled ‘bout nothin’. We had stopped goin’ to the store much, so we didn’t even need the refrigerator anymore. We’d just go into the grocery and pick up the things we needed for the month and then head back home and eat what came outta the garden and play games all the time.” An orderly came by with Erma’s tray. Boiled chicken, again. Erma pushed the tray away and tried to remember where she was in the conversation.

“I got off track, didn’t I? I was talking ‘bout the bridge. Well, we was up on that bridge taking everythin’ in and just livin’, as Momma used to say. All of a sudden Momma grabbed me and said we needed to do somethin’ darin’. I wasn’t sure what Momma wanted to do, but we were gonna do it no matter what. Momma got this look in her eyes, like she was so excited. You know what I’m talkin’ ‘bout? She just looked like she was all lit up inside. That’s when she decided that we needed to jump off a that old bridge. She said we’d fly like the birds and then swim like the fish and then we would free like all the wild animals. Now, I never had no need to argue with Momma, so I figured it would be fun to jump off there, too. We got ourselves up on the railin’ and we spread our arms out like eagles getting’ ready to take off. Momma counted to three, and we flew off that bridge, just like the birds she was a talkin’ ‘bout. It felt like we were in the air forever before we reached the river. I remember just like it was yesterday, that feelin’ I had when we was up there”.

“I don’t really remember what happened when I got to the water ‘cause next thing I knew I woke up in the hospital. Now, I had never been to no hospital, and I was a little ‘fraid. And I was hurtin’ like I ain’t never hurt before. My head was hurtin’ and my leg had a big ol’ cast on it, and it was hurtin’ somethin’ awful, too. There was all kinds of folks walkin’ ‘round askin’ me if I was okay and what’d happened up there. I tried to tell all them folks what me and Momma were doin’ and how much fun it was, but they all just kept shakin’ their heads at me and givin’ each other funny looks. I told ‘em all that

me and Momma were just bein' free like the animals and that we wanted to fly."

"I hadn't seen Momma yet. She had to of been there somewhere, I wasn't sure where though. Maybe she was in a bed with a cast, too. Maybe she was in a room where people were talkin' to her about us flyin'. All I knew was that I wanted to go home, and I wanted to dance in the garden with Momma in the dark. I didn't like this hospital none at all. They just kept tellin' me to get some sleep. I didn't want no sleep, I wanted Momma."

I was layin' there in that bed when a fat, old lady walked in to my room and just sat herself down and started talkin' to me. She had a bag with a bunch of papers in 'em. Not like Momma's writin' but important lookin' papers that were too grownup for me to read. She started tellin' me that Momma wasn't able to take care of me and that I was gonna have to go live with some new folks for awhile. I didn't know what she was talkin' 'bout. Momma was a good mother. She was more fun than any other woman I ever knew of. I know people looked at her funny when we went out, but she always said they were just jealous. I was startin' to get scared and confused. All I knew was that I was goin' to a house with lights and there wasn't goin' to be anymore dancin' in the garden with Momma."

I kept askin' this old lady 'bout Momma and where she was. She wouldn't tell me nothin'. She just kept tellin' me that Momma was in a better place. She got her bag of papers and then told the doctor's that she would be checkin' me out. The next thing I knew I'm livin' with a family in the next county. Now, they was nice. And they had a nice house and a dog. I even got to have a brother whilst I lived with 'em. But it wasn't ever like being home with Momma. I had to start goin' to school and sleepin' at night. But, it wasn't too bad, really. They was nice folks and treated me pretty good. I had gained some weight, which seemed to make everybody really happy. I made friends and played games with kids my own age. I met Grandpop at the high school there in town. Maybe you'll meet some

nice fellow when you are in high school or college, wouldn't that be nice?"

Abby was still quietly listening to every word Erma was saying. She has been so patient while her granny had been telling her tale. She never knew all these things about her and then she had a thought followed by a sad look on her face.

"Well, Granny...what ever happened to your momma? Did you ever see her again? Did she drown in the river?"

"No, child. Momma spent the rest of her life in a place where she could dance as much as she wanted to. I went to see Momma twice a month at that hospital up there in the capital until she died a few years back. She was always happy and they made sure she was taken care of. So, Sweetie, she is in Heaven with Grandpop and all of the other souls. I'm sure she's still dancin' even in the clouds."

As Erma stands for a stretch, her daughter walks through the door.

"Hello, Mother. Have you been having a good visit with Abby? What did you two do while I was gone? Did she paint your fingernails, again?" Theresa looked refreshed and revived after her day out. Her newly styled hair made her look even more like her grandmother. She had the very same eyes as Momma. Looking at her daughter, Erma realized that her own child was just as beautiful as her own mother was.

"No, Theresa, we just sat here and told stories. I love to have Abby come visit. She is so much fun, and we get along so good that the time flies when she is here. Now sit down and talk to me before you have to run off. I miss you, too. Oh, we need to talk 'bout somethin'. I know with that high-payin' job you got you can go buy that child some marbles. Go out and get that youngun' some real toys to play with. And you need to sit down and play 'em with her. They grow up before you know it. Next thing you know they're visitin' you in the nursing home once a month and you're eatin' boiled chicken every Wednesday. "



Ashley Mignosa

Over the Curb

Jeff Call

The asphalt was already hot. The heat waves shimmered, and I was afraid the soles of my shoes would melt. No kidding, that's happened. Don told me about this guy who stood around waiting for customers until his shoes melted to the asphalt. Then the guy tried to up these people with his shoes looking like he'd stepped in two giant globs of gum, and there's no way to sell a car if that happens. I'm good at upping people. I have natural talent. Don explained how nobody can teach upping. You can either up or you can't, and if you can't, you need to find another career. Still, as good as I am, I couldn't up anyone with melted shoes on my feet.

Upping is easy. My trick is acting like I don't really care if the people buy a car. I just hang around, a little uninterested. I establish eye contact, and then I make my move. It works in real life, too. That's how I met Guinevere at school. She's new. She's so pretty that no guys, and hardly any girls, will talk to her; "intimidated," Don calls it. I found out her name was Guinevere Kzychski and that she was down from Michigan by looking through her folder while I was waiting to see Mrs. Adams, again. It took me two days to establish eye contact, and even that was tricky. I waited by the south entrance where Guinevere was dropped off all week by the same grocery-getter, white Pontiac Parisienne wagon with the wood and leather package, but before I could establish solid eye contact, she'd gone straight inside.

It wasn't until afternoon when I was on my way to work that I had a chance to make my move. I just wandered into the classroom and hung around, uninterested, until she looked at me. "So," I said, "you got Browning for calculus?"

"Yes," she said, not "yeah" like most girls.

"Cool," I said, and I didn't say it like some 50's greaser or a burned-out hippy stoner. I said it like Steve McQueen says "cool" because it was cool, and I was being honest. Then I just played the waiting game like Don taught me: First one who talks loses.

"Are you in here, too?" she asked, and I could tell she couldn't handle the awkward silence between us. I let the tension build.

"No," I said and shrugged, "on my way to work. I just wanted to stop by and say 'Hi.'" Then I squinted my eyes and nodded my head fast like Steve McQueen does to Paul Newman in the *Towering Inferno*. I figured since she was new in town and a girl and all, she probably hadn't seen it yet, so she wouldn't recognize me stealing his moves. Then I gave her hand a polite, firm shake, and I walked away. I didn't tell her my name or even where I work. See, I increased her interest level, and she'll think about me all weekend. I also have a reason to follow up with her on Monday. Don always says to have a reason to follow up. "Hey, Guinevere, remember we met Friday? I saw your name on your

notebook, and I was in such a hurry to get to my job, I forgot to introduce myself.” It would be cool like Steve McQueen talks to Ali McGraw in *The Getaway*. Steve loves her, but he’s sometimes preoccupied with his business, robbing banks and getting away, and she has to accept him for who he is and that’s that. Trust me, it works. He’s married to Ali McGraw. How cool is that?

By noon the asphalt was really baking our feet, and I was trying to remember if I had signed out for the day with Mrs. Adams, vice principal and counselor for the Career Assistance Placement Program, or if I had forgotten again and would get chewed out on Monday. She could just call over to JACK BLAKELY’S CARS OF DISTINCTION: THE HOME OF HONOURABLE DEALING and double check with Don to see if I’m here, but she won’t because that’s “not her job.” I looked up at the banner again. Don said that Jack Blakely spelled honor with the extra “u” because it was the British way, and that’s called “marketing.” Plus, Jack had a thing for Jaguars. I told Don the “u” thing made sense because in *The Great Escape* the British guys seemed really concerned with honor. I mean, Steve McQueen is the coolest guy in the movie, but it’s still pretty sad when the British guys get killed.

Don says observations like that are why I’m not just the lot boy anymore. Now I’m also the assistant sales technician. A young man with my keen insights should do more than just wash and park cars. Don wrote a letter to Mrs. Adams when he promoted me. I keep the carbon copy in case I’m ever stopped by cops or truant officers. Don explained that my additional duties would involve leaving the work site for priority errands, which could include important documents and large sums of money. It was pretty funny watching Don peck out the letter on Mary’s typewriter. He had to use his skinny glasses. Mary couldn’t type it because she had a meeting with Jack that afternoon. They have meetings about two or three times a week. Don told Mrs. Blakely once that Jack’s meetings were about the energy crisis and new regulations on fuel economy.

Mrs. Adams was really cheesed off when she read Don’s letter, especially the part about my trustworthiness and reliability.

She hates me. She's had it in for me ever since she tried to make the Career Assistance Placement Program students all wear caps, for CAPP, get it? I'm not wearing a stupid cap. Seriously, when did you ever see Steve McQueen wear a cap? *The Magnificent Seven* doesn't count because he's wearing a cowboy hat. Mrs. Adams said he wore a cap in *The Sand Pebbles*. That's just like her, trying to prove me wrong by talking about the one movie I haven't seen. My point is I shouldn't have to wear a CAPP cap, especially since I've been promoted and need to go on priority errands for Don. I just got my learner's permit last month, but Don lets me slap a plate on any of the old trades before the wholesaler takes them.

Don told me he had a priority errand for me: Take the Olds 88 and get him some coffee the way he likes it with cream, saccharine, two cheeseburgers hold the onions, and a pack of Marlboros. Jack won't pay to get the coffee machine fixed because Don is the only one who drinks coffee, and Don won't pay to get it fixed because, "It's the money, not the principle of the thing." I road tested the Oldsmobile, too. I drove around listening for knocks or rattles. Obviously, an assistant sales technician performing a road test while on a priority errand can't be seen wearing a stupid cap. I drove down Second Avenue by the school. Nobody was outside, not even the third time when I circled by checking the clicking sound in the steering column. Guinevere was probably doing calculus. I wonder what Mrs. Adams would have said if she had seen me without my CAPP cap.

When I pulled into the Sohio station, Ricky was waiting for me. He already had Don's cigarettes. "Don called over here looking for you. He said get back there pronto."

"Really?" I packed the smokes and tore open the cellophane. "Were those his exact words?" I pushed in the cigarette lighter and let the Marlboro dangle from my lips. I can talk with a cigarette dangling from my lips, but not when it's lit. "Don doesn't speak Spanish."

Ricky shoved back his CAPP cap. "He said, 'Tell him to get back here pronto.' Then he said, 'Tell him Code 3 on the blue Impala.'" Ricky jumped back from the 88 as I took off. What an

idiot! If he can't learn to relay messages, he'll always wear a CAPP cap. "Code 3 on the blue Impala" was very important. He should have said that first. I just went from a priority errand to a Code 3 assignment.

Except that I was driving a blue Olds 88, not a green Ford Mustang, and there are no hills in town, unlike San Francisco, I drove just like Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*. The tires squealed, and I even lost a hub cap at Grape Street and Second Avenue. Another car, a pea green Plymouth Valiant with the Slant 6, slammed on its brakes and honked its horn. I lost the hub cap as I turned the corner, and my cigarette fell out of my mouth and burned some upholstery on the front seat. Don will tell Jack we took in the car on trade that way. I guess that near miss was kind of my fault. You can turn right on red in Ohio, but not left. Still, it was pretty cool. I wish I had a cable car to pass, or at least a bus.

I parked behind the sales office and smoked another one to calm down. When I approached the office, I saw Don talking to a customer: not a drill, a real Code 3. I took a couple of deep breaths and charged in. "Hey, Buddy. How much you want for that blue Impala?"

Don looked surprised, "Excuse me, sir?"

The customer, who didn't look like anybody in the movies, looked a little surprised. I shoved by him to Don's desk. "How much for the blue Impala?"

Don chuckled, "Actually, this gentleman is interested in that very same car."

"Well, I ain't paying two thousand dollars for that car," the customer said and started walking.

"Great! I'll pay you two thousand right now." I slapped my hand on the desk for effect.

"Two thousand is the retail price," said Don, "plus there's tax, title, documentation fees, and delivery charges."

"I don't care. I'll pay you three thousand for the car right now!" It was working. The customer hadn't left. He was still listening. He was on the hook, and now we were going to put him the boat.

“You know, there’s a very sad story behind that car,” Don began.

“Oh, you guys always got a story,” said the customer as he sat down again.

“I want to buy that car right now.” I took out my checkbook, actually a day planner compliments of Smith & Lewis Insurance, and waved it at Don.

“Hey,” asked the customer, “aren’t you a little young to buy a car?”

I’d been waiting for that. I set my jaw like Steve McQueen does before he punches or shoots someone. I stared down the customer. “Mister, Charlie never asked me how old I was in Da Nang.” The customer grunted and squirmed in his chair. Don took off his big, round glasses and rested his chin on his fist. I could feel him getting nervous because I was ad-libbing. “So, what’s the story?”

Don put on his glasses again. “Well, the widow who sold it to us said her husband had been very wealthy, but the old man didn’t trust banks. He kept most of their wealth in cash, along with treasury bonds, stocks certificates and such. All of their money was in paper. After he died, his widow couldn’t find any of it. She looked everywhere in the house, their safety deposit box, even had a backhoe dig all around her yard. Seems the old man got eccentric and hid his fortune in a secret place. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in liquid assets, and the poor old gal can’t find it anywhere.” Don took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose, shaking his head in pity. It was a darn good performance. Then he coughed a little and glanced over at me.

“Oh yeah,” I said, “I heard the same story at the funeral home. Say, you guys haven’t serviced that car yet, have you?”

Don sat up straight. “Young man, here at JACK BLAKELY’S CARS OF DISTINCTION: THE HOME OF HONOURABLE DEALING, each of our previously enjoyed automobiles undergoes a thorough forty-nine-point inspection.”

“No,” I cut in, “I mean you haven’t taken anything out or replaced anything, right?”

Don glanced through his notebook. "Well, we just acquired that vehicle. I see it's scheduled for an oil change, new points and ---"

"Forget all that!" I shouted. "Don't touch that car, and I'll pay you three grand right now."

"All right, sir. Just let me draw up a bill of sale." Don rummaged through his desk and shuffled papers, playing the waiting game, waiting for the loser to talk.

"Wait just a damn minute," the customer said to Don. "I'm still dealing on that car. You said you'd sell it to me for two thousand dollars."

"I'll pay three, right now," I told Don.

Don sat back, put his glasses on his forehead and rubbed his eyes. Then he stood up and slowly put his hand over his heart. "This gentleman's right. I'd like to sell you the car for three thousand dollars, but he made an offer of two thousand dollars first, and here at JACK BLAKELY'S CARS OF DISTINCTION: THE HOME OF HONOURABLE DEALINGS, we must deal honorably."

I looked really angry at Don, the way Steve McQueen looks at Robert Vaughn in *Bullitt*. I pounded his desk again for effect, glared over at the customer, then walked out of Don's office. "To hell with both of you." I slammed his door for even more effect.

Two hours later Don was outside the office. I parked the Olds and gave him his cigarettes. "Half a pack?"

I explained that I'd been hiding out at the Sohio station. I forgot the coffee and burgers. Don just fished around in his pockets for his lighter. I couldn't win the waiting game. I had to know. "So, did you get him delivered?"

Don smiled his big smile where he shows his gold bicuspid. "Full pop. Service and delivery fees included." He peeled me off a five dollar bill from his money clip.

"Thanks. Five bucks works for me."

Don said check again. "Same war, different beard." It was a fifty. "It ain't a great way to make a living, but sometimes it

ain't bad." We went back inside, and he handed me the big marker. "Mr. Assistant Sales Technician, I think you should write this deal on the board. It's a funky name. I don't even remember how to say it. K-Z-Y-"

"C-H-S-K-I," I finished writing the name on the sales board.

"How'd you know?"

I'm not sure what I felt right then. Remember in *The Cincinnati Kid* when Edward G. Robinson flips over the Jack of Diamonds, and Steve McQueen stumbles away from the poker table and into the alley? Steve realizes he's lost all his money, his dreams, everything. Then Tuesday Weld hugs him. He's completely busted out, but he still gets the girl. Then again, he's Steve McQueen, a guy so cool he can stare down Nazis even when he's tangled up in barbed wire. "Don, that girl I was telling you about, Guinevere? That's her last name, too. You think it could be a coincidence?"

Don laughed and coughed so hard he doubled over to catch his breath. "No coincidence. No such thing. I don't guess there's any reason to follow up with her."

"What happens when her dad finds out?"

Don lit another cigarette. "Finds out what? There's no fortune in that Chevy? So what? We didn't lie. We implied. We told a story. We never said it was true. Besides, he got a good deal on a good car, and he'll be too embarrassed to tell anyone what we did. He signed the papers. He's an owner." Don put his hand on my shoulder the way dads do in movies when they care about their sons. "You didn't do anything wrong. Forget about him. He's over the curb."

"I think I understand now what Mary said the other day, about how there's really no 'u' in 'honor.' She meant 'Y-O-U,' didn't she?"

Don squeezed my shoulder so I'd know he was sincere. "She's a secretary. She can think like that, but you're an assistant sales technician. Look out there. Tell me what you see." I told Don a navy blue Mercury Montego just pulled in. "And ...?" Old people. "With ...?" The windows down, broken a/c. They're

cheap. “And...?” Car washed, tires dressed. They’re ready to trade. “So...?”

“I’ll go out nice and slow and mention the guy named Don gave my family a great deal on a car with free snow tires and free oil changes for life.”

Don let go of my shoulder and patted me on the back. “Go throw a rope around them, Mr. Senior Assistant Sales Technician.”

Later, when Don had them in his office signing papers, I remembered how in *Papillon* Steve McQueen and the other prisoners on Devil’s Island would lie to each other and say they looked okay even though they were sick and dying. There’s probably a lesson in there somewhere. I’m not sure about everything going on in my life, but *The Sand Pebbles* is on the late show tomorrow night, so maybe I’ll get some answers.



Blair Leach

Little White Pumpkin
Rebecca Harley Lawrence

the season is here
red and yellow leaves
frigid autumn air
plaid jackets, fur lined
orange and round vegetables
ready to be picked
taken home and carved
a face to scare

except for one
so small and scant
and quite unusual
the color for the season

singled out
among orange fire balls
the emerald vines tangled
foliage on the dirt bed

pass over the unknown
an off-white color
strange yet beautiful
choose the little white pumpkin

take it home
place the white sphere
on the mantle but
do not slice it

instead
stare at the beauty
adorn it with leaves
acorns all around

Elegy for My Dog, Who Is Not Dead
(after Hudgins' "Elegy for Father, Who Is Not Dead")
Dylan Patterson

King, one day you'll die.
Nobody knows how it'll happen.
Maybe you'll choke on a rawhide
Could be cancer or heartworm
But I sure as hell hope not.

I hope you die running.
Tearing ass through dense woods
Kicking up leaves and dirt
Yelping & snorting & sniffing while
You track a pack of 10 black cats.
Your little red doggy dick
Thrusting in the cool autumn air
'Cause you're so goddamn afire with want.

I'm in the distance, not yelling as usual when you run off.
Just letting you go.
Your memory of me fades
As quickly as the fall afternoon sun.

And just as you make your final heroic leap
Toward the screaming bundle of black cats,
Your paws reaching and yearning
Jaw clenching
Blood churning
Just as you've managed to finally shake off the stubborn
Chain of gravity you've strained against
Every mortal day
Of your beautiful mutt life,
Right
Then.
That's when I hope
You go.



Analie Foland

The Family Portrait

Rebecca Morris

“Five, four, three . . .” he counts down
smile plastered cheekily upon his face.
My father briskly maneuvers the obstacle course in front of him:
dog bone, cat’s mouse, countless pairs of shoes. “Two, one!”

Flash!

He has managed in the last two seconds to pose by us
in front of the Christmas tree, days after Christmas.
The dog has his tail between his legs.
He knows it’s time, while
the cat is lured with nip.
My sister is coaxed from her room, wiping tears from her face
mad because I always win the fight on who gets to hold the dog.

Lights flashing, family matching
in coded sweaters, reds and greens.
An array of photos, taken.
The camera comically capturing:
The dog’s yawns,
the cat’s scrambling,
my sister’s dull smile and mine crooked,
mom’s eyes closed, but
dads perfectly plastered fake smile, the same in
Every
Single
Picture

The selection process becomes a project,
the perfect photo must be chosen.
Our belated *Christmas Greetings* become
Wishing You A Happy New Years From Our Family to Yours.
Family and friends will look and smile,
Saying, “What a perfectly organized family!”;
if they only knew . . .



Angelica Dipaolo

The Green Eyed Whore

Sharon Demas

I never imagined, and I had a pretty good imagination, that things could turn out the way they did. How could Daddy's longed for homecoming become so heart breaking and make me cry so much?

World War II was almost over, at least that was what the papers were reporting. I wondered what I would do when I saw my Daddy again. Almost two years had passed since I had hugged him, and I had forgotten what he smelled like. There were pictures a plenty to remind me of how he looked, but how would he feel?

Then suddenly things changed. Bombs were dropped on Japan. The War was over. Daddy was coming home!

I remember that day when he came home. It was starting to darken a little outside. Suddenly I saw from the window a dark brown car passing our house. It went down the street to the corner, stopped for a while, then turned around and came to a halt in front of our house. We had never seen that car before in our whole lives. We were peeking out the window wondering who was in that mysterious car.

Then suddenly, there he was, still in uniform, and walking up the sidewalk to us. His navy pressed pants still held a razor sharp crease, there were three fold creases in his white sailor collar, and the white sailor cap was perched precariously and haphazardly atop his dark wavy hair. The one curl that always seemed to have a life of its own, slipped down underneath the stiff white military cap and floated over his forehead, part of his signature persona.

"He's here. He's here, Mama. Daddy's home," the three of us screeched and hollered as he came in the front door. With hugs and kisses and a million questions, we rocked him backwards on the hard floor as he was squatting trying to gather up all his little babies up in his arms. After many more slobbering kisses and bear hugs, Mommy then latched onto him for her turn. We little ones returned to our interrupted play content that we had caught up on our fair share of loving from our Daddy for a while.

Then I saw the grin, the Clark Gable smile that spread across his dark handsome face and enveloped, charmed, and captivated all those who encountered it. Gone with the Wind was walking up our curving sidewalk.

Before Daddy came home from the War, there were just the four of us. I was five, Judy was barely four, and Stevie was not yet three. I was the quiet child, the one who took life seriously even at my tender young age. I grasped ideas quickly and acted as the little Mama to the babies. My big brown eyes would focus my attention intently on all things around me and vacuum them in. My light reddish brown shoulder length hair floated softly and wrapped softly around my chubby little face. I fantasized all the time about the day when we would all be just one happy family together again.

Mama was twenty three then, a real beauty everyone said. With her red hair, slim body, and Rita Hayworth face, her beautiful demeanor belied the fact that she had already born three children in a little over four years. She had raised her children right. We were polite and amiable. We knew we had to be. This red haired woman had an Irish temper to go with it, and we had learned to fear it. She kept us children close to her as she braved the days alone: her sailor husband was somewhere in the Pacific Ocean fighting in World War II.

We children were totally oblivious to the circumstances and peril that our country faced. We lived a quiet life, a kind of Mayberry existence together in a little yellow wooden house with huge tall trees that hovered over the sidewalk and crept onto the quiet two lane street. One side of our yard facing a neighbor's driveway was bordered with a tattered short white picket fence adorned with chunks of peeling paint. The other side sprouted rows of Hollyhocks that we picked and made into ballerinas, the buds being the heads and the flowers being their dancing skirts. Similar other small little cottages like ours dotted the rest of Ribble Avenue. Children's voices spread cheer up and down our street as they played all day on the long sloping dandelion infested front lawns.

Our days were mundane and lazy. We watched squirrels scampering from one tree top to another displaying their flying acrobatic skills and defying us to try and catch them. We were content to let them have the air. We squished our bare toes through the cool moist sand in our big sandbox that was under one of the old tall oaks that waved its leaves gently in the wind mocking the birds as they flew overhead. We built sand castles. We listened to the only 78 rpm record that we had. The recording had a voice of a cow on it mooing in rhyme to the music. That always sent us reeling with laughter whenever we heard the cow's voice bellow, "Mooooooooooooo." We played hide and seek in the thicket of bushes that rimmed our back yard, and we told ghost stories as we dared one another to spend just to the count of ten in our cold dark dank spider web infested coal shelter basement.

Quiet times were the times the babies had to take naps. Mama had a hard time getting them down. "Lie down and shut your eyes," she would tell them. When she heard one of them get out of bed, she would go into the bedroom and sternly warn them, "If you get out of bed one more time I am going to bring the switch in here." She always kept a yardstick that she called her switch on top of the ice box for just such occasions. They invariably had to be warned several times before their little eyelids finally stayed shut.

I was far too old to take a nap, so I would venture outdoors and spread a blanket smoothly and carefully under the gigantic canopy of my favorite old oak tree "Oakie" and make doll clothes for my doll or practice drawing pictures of princesses. I was quite talented at art for a five year old. These blanket times were some of my favorite times. Mama's too. Making doll clothes with the babies awake was so distressing as they were always taking my stuff and messing things up. I liked a certain order about me. I accomplished some very industrious feats during these quiet times. Mama just took this time to rest a spell.

When we would get a letter from Daddy, we were always excited. They were few and far between, and sometimes they arrived out of order according to the dates they were written. Sometimes they arrived in batches.

“Here’s one for you, and you, and you,” the mail man smiled as he handed each of us a letter. “Me first. Me first,” we all squealed as we jumped up and down trying to grab a letter. “And the last one is for you, Mam,” he smiled as he handed a letter to Mama.

We never really knew where Daddy was or what he was doing. He never seemed to get the pictures that I would carefully color and send to him, the ones I worked on for such long times. Anyway he never mentioned them. Mama was always thrilled to hear from her sailor. Sometimes she cried when she read his letters. Mama saved all of Daddy’s letters in a box that she put on a shelf in the bedroom closet. Sometimes she re-read them. I never understood that. Once you read a letter, it says the same thing when you read it again.

We kept hoping and praying that maybe the war would be over soon and Daddy would come home to us on Ribble Avenue, to the little yellow cottage with Oakie standing tall and on guard, and we would all be one happy family again. Mama made us get down on our knees by the bed each night and pray that Daddy would come home safe and sound.

All families got ration stamps from the government once a month. Our fighting boys had first priority on certain products, and the rest of us citizens got ration stamps to take to the store to buy the items that the government had rationed and allotted to us. Two of these foodstuffs were sugar and cooking oil. Another thing that was rationed was rubber. You couldn’t buy rubber balloons, ration stamps or not! Rubber was used for war materials. It was during this era that someone came up with a recipe for a chocolate Mayonnaise cake as Mayonnaise has cooking oil, which was rationed, and eggs in it.

“It’s the Omar man. Mama, Mama, it’s the Omar man,” we screamed as we flew into the house as fast as our little legs could transport us. “He’s coming now. We hear his bell ringing. Hurry, Mama, hurry or he will be gone.”

We were big fans of the Omar man. He came down our street twice a week, and he knew us all by name, each person in each house on the street. We always ran to get Mama when we

heard his brown truck coming. He carried powdered sugar donuts, cinnamon rolls, and bread right to your front door. He was a virtual bakery on wheels. I always wondered where he got all his cooking oil to bake with when we couldn't get all the cooking oil we needed with or without ration stamps.

He really wasn't a he. He was a she, but we still called her the Omar man. Our regular Omar Man was off fighting in the war. This Omar man was named Garnet. She was a beauty, green eyes and dark hair flowing down her back. We loved her and always gave her a hug. She was such a nice lady. "Hi girls and little man," she always greeted us. She

wasn't as pretty as Mama, though.

She carried powdered sugar donuts, cinnamon rolls, and bread right to your front door. She was a virtual bakery on wheels. I always wondered where she got all his cooking oil to bake with when we couldn't get all the cooking oil we needed with or without ration stamps.

"Why can't we wear our play clothes?" we fussed as we were getting dressed to go downtown. We were always meticulously dressed in our Sunday best on movie days. Going downtown was just like going to church in our small home town. You dressed up. That was in the olden days. People dressed up then for certain occasions. You had certain clothes for certain occasions.

Saturday was movie and fudge day, not just any fudge, but the famous creamy dark chocolate fudge that could only be bought at the little candy shop next to the Rivoli Theater downtown. We eye balled every piece of candy in that store—gum drops, Mary Janes, licorice, taffy, root beer balls, jaw breakers—you name it. We devoured them all with our eyes. Mama had a rule that we could look but not touch, and we dared not do otherwise. "Keep your hands to your sides," she would warn. But once in a while when she wasn't looking, we would grab a fudge crumb and hurriedly shove it into our mouths and eat it. In the end we always choose the fudge to take to the movies.

Life was fun, mundane, predictable, comfortable, and happy then. That little old yellow house on Ribble Avenue with

Oakie and his giant friends held more than its fair share of smiles, chuckles and wide grins. Memories were made there. Life was simple and pleasurable. I liked our life back then. I missed my Daddy, but I wasn't sure all the time that I wanted him to come back home. I was afraid that it all would be changed and spoiled some how when he came back. I felt bad thinking like that, and I didn't dare tell a soul my secret thought.

Now here he was home, and we were all together again, one family. Things didn't seem to have changed at all. Many hours later, or at least the time seemed that way in the mind of a five year old, a loud commotion was heard coming from the bedroom. Mama was screaming and crying. "You can't go, you can't go." She was sobbing and choking on her gasps for air. "Please don't leave us." Daddy yelled back. "Get out of my way, bitch. I'm leaving now." Then we heard loud thuds resounding clear into the living room.

I raced to the bedroom and the two babies followed. The three of us started screaming and hollering. Daddy yelled, "You kids get the hell out of here." The babies left, but I wouldn't leave. Suddenly Daddy slapped my Mama and slammed her against the wall. With just one punch, she crumpled to the floor. Daddy looked surprised to see me still standing there. Then he turned to leave.

Suddenly this obscure little dynamo inside me went berserk. With arms flailing, feet flying, and shouting at the top of my lungs, I gathered all the strength savored in every inch of my little body and went on automatic pilot. I mounted a vicious attack on this six foot strange giant sailor.

"Leave her alone, leave her alone," I screamed. One tiny arm found a target and struck and hit his thigh. My target practice immediately caused an ugly huge bruised egg on my forearm. My flying tiny feet found his adult shins close to the floor, and I kicked repeatedly at him. Snot poured from my nose, and tears streamed down my face as I shouted and savagely screamed, "Leave her alone. Leave her alone." I fought to fell this ugly beast. One punch was all it took, and I too suddenly felt the hardness of the wall as my little body slid down the wall and rested upon my Mama's. Then Daddy walked around us and left out the front door.

Sobbing and heaving, I quickly raced to the front room and cautiously pushed the lace curtain aside and peered into the semi-darkness trying not to be seen. Daddy quickened his pace and walked fast down the sidewalk under Oakie towards that mysterious brown colored car. The light came on when Daddy opened the green car door. And there she was, the green eyed whore sitting in the passenger side of the car---the Omar man!

She was holding a beer bottle in one hand, something that Mama would never do. Daddy drank beer, but Mama would never touch the stuff. Then with her other hand she patted my Daddy on the leg, he shut the door, and then they drove off together.

I ran back to the bedroom to see about Mama. "Mama, Mama, why did Daddy hit us?" I questioned as I saw her body still crumpled on the floor. Judy and Stevie were running around the house screaming at the top of their lungs like complete lunatics. They didn't understand what had happened and neither had I, but at least I had the good sense to settle down. Most people didn't have telephones back then or somebody probably would have called the cops on us with all the ruckus that we were making.

"Hush, be quiet. I need to talk with Mama," I shouted to them. Their little ears never comprehended that I was trying to calm them down while I tried to see if Mama was still alive. They wailed and wailed, even more loudly.

"Mama, Mama, talk to me. Where is Daddy going? Who was that woman in the car? Where is Daddy going with her? He is supposed to stay here with us now. Mama, Mama, talk to me." But all she did was lie on the floor crumpled in a heap just like he left her. Sobbing I ran to the bathroom to grab some tissue to wipe the tears and snot off Mama's face. "Here Mama, take this. Wipe your nose."

Slowly she started to sit up, and then I knew that she was still alive. She dabbed at her face, but her sobs were so strong she couldn't speak to me. Her chest heaved uncontrollably. I heard the huge intakes of air as she tried to fill her lungs between uncontrolled chest heaves. Tears were still streaming down her face. She was immobilized with fear and with not understanding what had just happened to us.

“What’s wrong, Mama? Where is Daddy going with that woman? Who is she? Why is she with our Daddy?” Mama wasn’t in a talking mood much right then. “It’s time for you all to get ready for bed now. You don’t have to take a bath tonight. Just brush your teeth.”

She got us all ready for bed and tucked us in. I knew it was too early to go to bed because there was still a little bit of light outside. But I reasoned that this wasn’t the time to argue with Mama.

Long after we were in bed and supposedly fast asleep, I still heard Mama weeping and sobbing in the living room. I quietly got out of bed and peered around the corner. I saw her clinging to a chair and sitting on the floor. She was still crying when I finally fell asleep much later.

Somehow I knew that Mayberry was lost forever.



Mary Katherine White

A Tremendous Love Poem

Rob McClure

Lift up your chin, my dear
Wipe that teardrop from your eye,
Let no temper abet your fear,
Bare every shadow by its lie.

Raise your eyes, sweet dearest
Sorrow knows you're too pure for its clutches,
The commanding horizon is want of your spirit
Shining to the tips of eternity's touches...

Delirious wind howls through peaks and forests
Paying no heed to damned virtue and sin,
Alighting its revelation in the dulcet chorus
Of miracles wrought in the brush of your skin...

The sea breathes to bring you spectacle,
Its waves swell with a joyous aching
For they know your presence is but a second 'til
They'll leave heartbroken from their breaking...

The autumn leaves turn and dance
Petrified of remaining static,
Hoping, if only, to catch your glance
And cherish the one moment they had it...

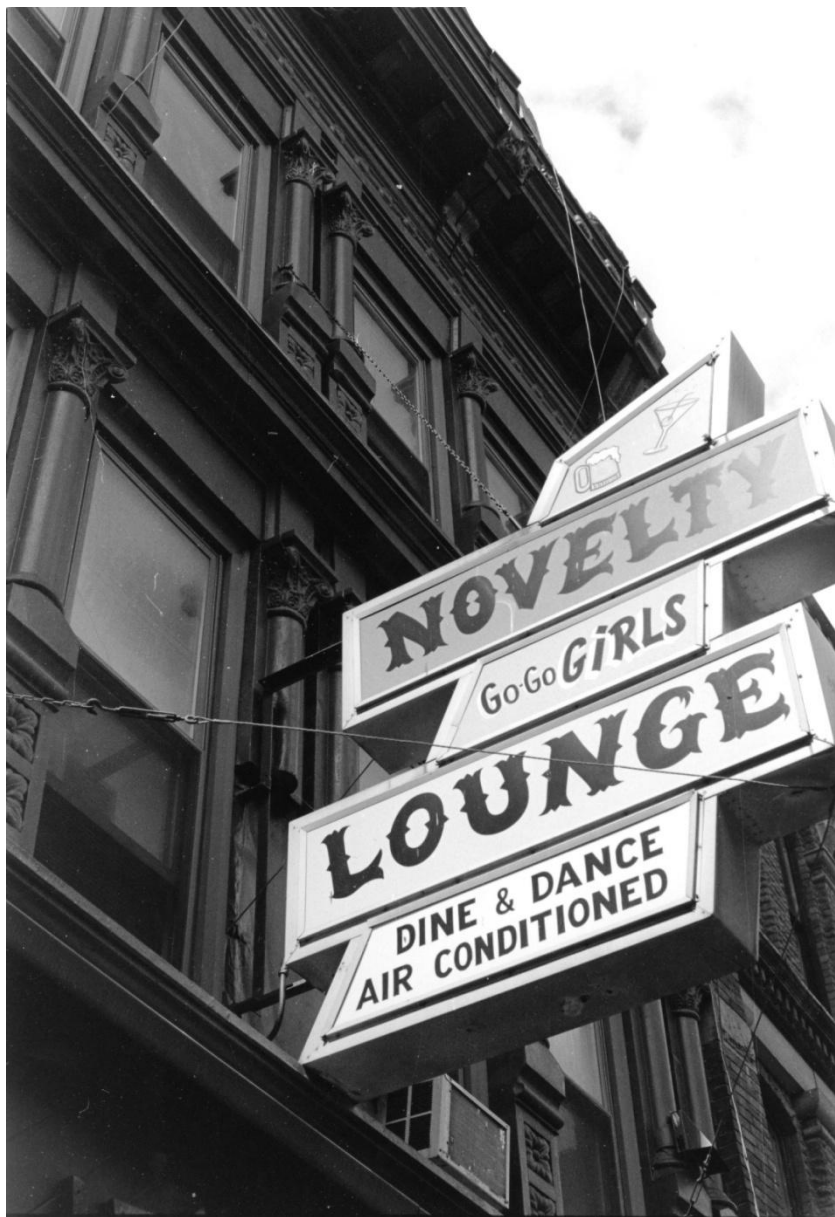
At dusk the pale sun does blush,
Knowing that he must wait 'til the morning after
To hear again the angelic hush
Following the beauty of your laughter...

Silenced dirt atones in improvement
Sprouting rich flowers from destitute seed,
Polychromatic accents to your movement,
Finding in your unconscious approval it's freed...

And offering up their lives upon landing
Idealistic raindrops explode on the street,
Blindly hoping they'll strike where you're standing,
Their virtue, to die at your feet.

Understand that everything which succumbs to death
Is also everything once given rise,
And all would forfeit their prized last breath
To witness you gracefully raise your eyes.

So lift up your chin, and displace
Every tribulation and every trial
With the truth that strokes your damp face,
The world exists to make you smile.



Alexandra Bourget

city rain
Ann McCray

reflections catch
raindrops, tiny oil spills
on pitted surfaces of well-worn
windshields, miniscule
cracks
lower left corner,
maybe right
or center,
red taillights wink
and bob, white headlights
tease to shimmer
forest green go-light one block
down, night prisms
race rayed frequencies
randomly into
blackened asphalt pools
casually, temperature's
dropping
a man, his bicycle
peddle faster, joggers sprint
home toward warehoused
apartments
across the 3rd Street bridge,
even dogs don't
sniff trafficked brick
corners overlong,
grateful owners
leashed, harried...

bless an otherwise
odious mist that
neither washes
nor refreshes
but only wets
unnamed dreams
and tomorrow's
bread



Amanda Rivera

Hush
Ty Whitley

I can hear her voice
It is cinnamon being dragged across asphalt
Her cries gurgle, thrashing violently
She tells me she's okay.

And her eyes gloss like ivory marble
While her chest falls and her voice quells
The petals have been wrung from her flower
But she tells me she's okay.



David Chappell

Guidelines for Submission

Portals accepts submissions from current CFCC students, faculty, and staff during the Fall Semester. Submit electronically by visiting <http://www.cfcc.edu/portals>.

Writer Guidelines

1. Writing entries must be electronically submitted as .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .txt files.
2. Writing entries must be formatted using 12 pt. Times New Roman font.
3. For Short Fiction and Non-Fiction, indent each new paragraph by 5 spaces using the tab button (not space bar). Follow conventions for punctuating dialogue.
4. Single space all writing entries unless part of style.
5. The title of each work and author's name, address, telephone number, and email address must be completed on the online submission form.
6. **The author's name must not appear anywhere on the work itself.**
7. Entries should be labeled as Fiction, Non-Fiction, or Poetry. **(ON THE SUBMISSION FORM)**
8. Submit only well-edited copies that would be ready for publication. Use or omission of punctuation will be considered intentional, or part of style, and will not be "corrected" by editors. **DOCUMENTS THAT DO NOT MEET SPECIFICATIONS WILL NOT BE SELECTED FOR PUBLICATION OR AWARDS.**
9. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but no more than three pieces total (one piece of Short Fiction/Non-Fiction and two Poems) may be submitted per submission period.

Artist Guidelines

Prints, Photographs, Computer Art, Drawings, Paintings

1. All art entries must be submitted electronically as .tiff (preferred) .jpg, .jpeg, .gif, or .psd files with a target dpi of 300 and a minimum image width of 4 inches.
2. All entries should be submitted in black and white.
3. The title of each work and author's name, address, telephone number, and email address must be completed on the online submission form.
4. **The author's name must not appear anywhere on the work itself.**
5. Entries should be labeled as 2-D Art or Photography. **(ON THE SUBMISSION FORM)**
6. All entries must be technically proficient.
7. Vertical composition is preferred for prize/cover art consideration.
8. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but no more than a total of two pieces per category of art may be submitted.

Previously unpublished submissions only. *Portals* acquires First North American Serial Rights. All other rights revert to the author upon publication.

Portals Literary and Arts Magazine

Cape Fear Community College

English Department

411 North Front Street

Wilmington, NC 28401-3993

(910) 362-7238

Email – portals@cfcc.edu

Website – www.cfcc.edu/portals

Facebook Page – *Portals Literary and Arts Magazine*